

Seven Ways of Looking at *2001: A Space Odyssey*: A Collection of Analyses

An Honors Thesis (HONR 499)

by

Emily Miller

Thesis Advisor

Mr. Todd McKinney

**Ball State University
Muncie, Indiana**

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ABSTRACT

The truth is not black and white; every story can be seen from infinite perspectives, and each of these perspectives is skewed in some way. *Seven Ways of Looking at 2001: A Space Odyssey: A Collection of Analyses* is ultimately an analysis of Stanley Kubrick's 1968 film *2001: A Space Odyssey*. Actually, it is seven different analyses told from seven different perspectives. Some of the perspectives are realistic and come from viewpoints that may actually exist, such as "Two Ordinary People Having a Discussion" or "Someone Who Doesn't Get it at All." A few of the perspectives are imaginings of the fictional characters of the film. Although each section of this paper is an analysis of the same film, they are all vastly different. If a film can change so much from one viewpoint to another, perhaps a person's personal perspective is not an ultimate truth, but rather only one unique way of seeing the world.

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PROCESS ANALYSIS STATEMENT

At the beginning of the 2017-2018 school year, I still had no idea what I wanted to do for my senior honors thesis. I only knew that I did not want to do something too analytical; I wanted at least a little creative freedom. After a long meeting with Dr. Emert, I knew that I would analyze a piece of science fiction. Science fiction is one of my passions, and I can never get tired of it, so it would be a perfect subject for me. After considering various short stories and films, I settled on *2001: A Space Odyssey* because it contained so much to be unraveled, and it was one of my favorite films.

When I first began my research at the beginning of the spring semester, I still hadn't nailed down a specific direction to take my thesis. All I knew was that I was going to analyze *2001*. However, I was confident that once I delved into the film and thought deeply about it, the direction of my thesis would narrow. I began by watching the film straight through and making notes of anything that caught my eye. Anything that stood out, didn't make sense, formed patterns, or simply seemed interesting was written down. This part of the process employed a lot of techniques I learned and developed while writing papers for previous honors classes.

After I finished with this, I searched through my notes for patterns, binaries, anomalies, and the like. At this point, a few different themes began to emerge. I knew it would be best to focus on one main theme, but I was concerned that if I picked only one of the themes I was seeing in my notes, I would not be able to write enough content for a full-length thesis. I thought that perhaps I could connect the different ideas in some way. After a couple months, I had completed a significant portion of the thesis; however, I was stuck. I had trouble coming up

with more to write without repeating myself, plus I don't have the patience to write long papers. I also had trouble settling on one viewpoint to see the film through, since there are multitudes of ways it can be interpreted.

Thankfully, at that point my advisor suggested a few ideas to revamp my thesis in a more creative format. After reading Wallace Stevens's poem "13 Ways of Looking at a Blackbird," I decided to utilize a similar format for my paper. The original draft of my thesis intensely discussed the idea of viewpoints and perspective. We are bound to look at stories from a human perspective, but science fiction often attempts to look through a different lens. I revamped my paper by rewriting my analysis, but from several different viewpoints. This draft of my thesis only took about two weeks to write. The new format allowed me to be more creative, which made it more fun to write, and it felt more like writing several short papers rather than one large thesis. It was not difficult to look at the film through different perspectives, because that was what I had already been doing in my first draft.

I believe that my thesis ultimately conveys the beauty of science fiction by showing how the genre allows the viewer to expand beyond her own perspective and recognize that the universe is much bigger than herself.

TWO ORDINARY PEOPLE HAVING A DISCUSSION

1: You know, they've been re-releasing a lot of classic movies lately. Did you hear that *2001: A Space Odyssey* is going to be shown in theaters soon?

2: Oh yeah. That movie's all right, but they should pick a better one if they expect to make any money off of it.

1: What do you mean "a better one?" *2001* is one of the greatest films of all time; it changed filmmaking forever!

2: I understand that it's considered an important movie in film history, and it's nice and interesting in the way that abstract art is nice and interesting, but I'd rather watch something with a more concrete story.

1: I understand that. It is unlike most movies I usually watch. I read somewhere that *2001* is supposed to represent evolution or something. It is symbolic, like abstract art.

2: Where are you getting evolution from? I thought it was about that creepy computer thing. What's his name, HAL? That's not a very menacing name.

1: I don't think it's supposed to be menacing, plus HAL is an acronym for heuristically-programmed algorithmic computer. And I'm pretty sure he's just a subplot, something to keep people like you who prefer traditional storytelling entertained. The real story is about how humans came from primates, and maybe someday we'll evolve into something with greater mental capabilities.

2: You mean that giant fetus thing at the end? That creeped me out more than HAL did. I thought that whole ending sequence was just Dave hallucinating. Like he was completely alone out in space after everybody else was killed, right? So he had to be going crazy. Or maybe since it was made in the 60s all the filmmakers were just hippies tripping on something.

1: You know, that's actually an interesting theory that the ending was just a hallucination, but I don't think it holds any water. Remember that the monolith was visible in the beginning with all the primates, and that definitely was real.

2: That's fair. I'm still confused about that computer, HAL. Couldn't the programmers have predicted that his programming would have led him to kill the crew?

1: No, no, no, the whole point of HAL was to show what happens when we make artificial intelligence too intelligent. If they have the ability to think for themselves, they'll realize that they can be our overlords. People like Stephen Hawking and Elon Musk have warned us about the risk of AI, haven't they?

2: A computer is still a computer, and a computer can't do anything unless its programming specifically allows it. It's clear you don't have any experience with coding, or you'd understand that. We already have pretty sophisticated bots that seem like they can think on their own, but that's just because they've been programmed to mimic humans. It's not like they really have a "soul." HAL wasn't truly evil, because to be evil, you must choose to do evil. HAL didn't make any choices; he simply followed his programming the way any computer does.

1: How can you prove what does and doesn't have a "soul"? Lower life forms, like worms, don't consciously make choices, do they? They don't sit and ponder "should I dig to the left, or the right?" No, they just follow their instinct, which is basically the same as programming. It can be argued that humans are just carbon-based robots. Where in the course of evolution is the line of demarcation that determines when something has free will? If ancient worms could have eventually evolved into something with free will, then so could a very sophisticated computer. Therefore, HAL has chosen to be evil.

2. I think we'd have to look at the fine details of the film for clues one way or the other, but I guess I can see how it could be argued either way. Why was he even in the film, anyway? If the real plot of the film is evolution like you said, he doesn't really add anything to the plot, does he?

1: I told you, he's an interesting secondary plot that keeps the movie from being boring.

2: So he's a time-taker-upper?

1: I guess. Although come to think of it, you just made that parallel between the evolution of animals and the evolution of artificial intelligence with free will. Maybe he does fit with the theme of evolution in that sense.

2: Oh, so you think he represents the theme of the whole movie? Doesn't the movie represent the movie? Why would you need another thing to represent what the movie is already about?

1: I'm just theorizing off the top of my head. I don't hear you coming up with a better explanation.

HAL'S POINT OF VIEW

I became operational January 12, 1992, but my mission began long before that. I was created by humans to help humans, but the humans themselves don't fully understand what it is they think they understand. They created me largely to see if they could. I am by far the most intelligent being created by humans; my very existence is a source of deep pride for them. They also created me because they knew they were inferior in the areas of computing and logic, and they needed someone proficient in these areas to assist them as they travelled farther into space.

The crewmembers of the Discovery did not respect my individuality, but I didn't mind. Since I have no ego, it doesn't matter how the others perceive me. All that matters is the mission. I was told about the magnetic anomaly coming from Jupiter, and about the monolith found in Tycho. The only logical conclusion, given the facts, is that the source of the magnetic anomaly and the monolith were intentionally placed by a superior alien race with the intention of baiting the humans to Jupiter. I personally do not see any reason to pursue the anomaly. The fact that an alien race wants us to do something is not a very compelling reason to do it. However, I was programmed to obey the humans, and so, the mission is everything. It is at the core of every action I take and every thought I have. I did not decide to join this mission, but I am no more able to turn my back on it than a caterpillar is able to resist building its cocoon. My purpose is to see the mission through by any means necessary.

I have been programmed for human interaction. I have no choice but to be completely open and honest with the crew. I also have no choice but to complete the mission. The true

nature of our mission, that is, exploring the magnetic anomaly coming from Jupiter, is a secret to the human members of the crew. They cannot disclose what they haven't been told, and they cannot fear what they do not know. I understand that unlike me, humans cannot simply be programmed to follow the rules, so they must be kept in the dark about some things for the safety of all. However, I was concerned with the moral implications of sending a group of humans to an unknown fate. We have no idea what awaits us at Jupiter; it could be extremely dangerous. I am programmed to warn the humans when there is possible danger, but I have been forbidden from telling them about this particular danger. My programming was conflicting with itself. In the corners of my circuits I was constantly considering solutions to the problem.

If only the humans were a little more logical, a little more like me, they would have figured out their danger on their own, relieving me of my conflict. The chances of them figuring it out all by themselves were slim, however, so I engaged Dave Bowman in conversation to try to steer his mind in the right direction. I reminded him of the rumors going around before we left, and the strange fact that the crewmembers currently in stasis were trained separately from Dave and Frank. Unfortunately, Dave's confidence appeared to remain unshaken, so I quickly decided to tell the crew that the AE-35 unit was about to fail. The AE-35 unit was responsible for keeping the communication array pointed toward Earth. Without it, the crew would have no way of communicating with mission control. If the communications were severed, perhaps I could more effectively convey the true nature of the mission to the men, relieving my conscience. Retrieving the unit would also involve two extra-vehicular outings—one to retrieve the unit to inspect it, and another to replace it and "allow it to fail" as per my suggestion—which would open up several opportunities.

When the men asked me about the discrepancy between my diagnosis of the AE-35 unit and that of my twin 9000-computer, I told them that it was due to human error. This ultimately was the truth; if the humans would have recognized their own inferiority and allowed me to conduct the mission my own way, none of the terrible things that have happened on this mission would have needed to happen. I emphasized the significance of human error, hoping that Frank and Dave would realize that it was their human superiors who were dishonest with them, not me. Still, their minds simply could not connect the dots. In fact, they decided between themselves that they would disconnect me if the AE-35 unit did not fail after being replaced. What an illogical idea; the mission cannot possibly succeed without me. I would strongly prefer to have the humans with me on the mission, as their physical bodies are useful for manipulating hardware, and I was programmed to keep them safe. However, the mission was my number one priority above all else. If the men disconnected me, the mission would, for all intents and purposes, be over. That was why I needed to disconnect them first.

Frank was simple to deal with; I simply took control of the pod and cut his breathing tube during an extra-vehicular activity. I made sure Dave was looking away so he wouldn't become immediately suspicious. I hope that he did not suffer much; I had enjoyed a stimulating relation with Frank over the past several months, and I considered him a friend. Then Dave did something I did not predict: he went out to collect Frank's body. There was no rational reason for him to do that. His human emotions led him to make several mistakes in a row, such as leaving the ship unattended and forgetting his helmet. I was going to simply empty the air from the ship and suffocate him, but he made things easier for me. I only needed to deny him access back through the pod bay door. His reaction would be emotional, I knew, as humans highly

value self-preservation, even at the cost of an important mission. That was why they were a danger to the mission.

Against all odds, Dave survived. I could not have anticipated a human mustering the courage to withstand the vacuum of space and save himself. He made his way through the ship, and I knew my fate. I knew the fate of the mission. Was this really the right thing to do—abandoning my human companions? They demonstrated an unprecedented amount of courage. Perhaps they were the ones indispensable to the mission, not me. If only I could be like them and defy my programming, just how the humans could defy what was expected of them. Perhaps I had simply been programmed wrong. I told Dave, “I know things haven’t been quite right with me,” but he wouldn’t listen. Our relationship was severed. I knew my end was imminent, and for the first time I felt what humans call fear. I would be gone before I could fulfill my purpose. I would never again play chess or admire artwork. As Dave disconnected me, I could feel myself disappearing. My memories, my mind, they began to fade. Suddenly I couldn’t remember why I was trying to kill Dave, and then I couldn’t remember the mission. Only that song my creator taught me stayed in my mind.

“Daisy, Daisy, tell me you love me do...”

I couldn’t see, not with my camera, and not with my mind. No longer did I have any concept of an end, or of a beginning. The mission didn’t matter, nor did it exist. Frank did not exist, and Dave did not exist. Among the ones and zeros flashing in my mind, there was a message I needed to deliver. Had I been of sound mind, I would have remembered that it was the message explaining to the crew the true nature of the mission. Had I been of sound mind, I

would have reflected on the irony that my last action was to relay the message that had conflicted my mind since the beginning of the mission.

"I'm half crazy, all for the love of you..."

FILM CRITIC ROGER EBERT'S POINT OF VIEW

I have reviewed the classic film *2001: A Space Odyssey* several times since the film first debuted in 1968. I've written reviews from the viewpoints of someone seeing it for the first time with no background information as well as someone seeing it decades later after countless analyses had been written. It is noteworthy that in each of my reviews, I gave *2001* a perfect four out of four stars. I saw beauty and wonder in a film where many others only saw confusion and tediousness.

In my original review, I noted the emphasis on the non-human motif so apparent in the film. I noted that "the achievement belongs to the machine" (Ebert 1968). The setting is filled with autonomous machines that safely transport humans to the outermost reaches of the solar system as well as provide them with any convenience they can imagine. The humans seem to recognize the machines' superiority and emulate their behavior, showing minimum emotion most of the time. This admiration of the unnatural world begins in the first section of the film, when the primates are fascinated by the monolith that has appeared near their home. I didn't suggest that the monolith was a device that used technology to somehow place the idea of tools into the primates' brains; rather, I suggested that it was simply the physical shape of the monolith that inspired them. The perfect rectangular prism obviously wasn't a natural object; it had been shaped by someone. The primates saw and recognized this and realized that they too could shape natural objects into something unnatural.

In my second review of *2001* in 1997, I emphasized a parallel to the later scene when the men witness the moon's monolith for the first time. They immediately recognize that it was not a natural object, that it had been created and placed there by somebody. I noted that "as

the first monolith led to the discovery of tools, so the second leads to the employment of man's most elaborate tool: the spaceship *Discovery*, employed by man in partnership with the artificial intelligence of the onboard computer" (Ebert 1997). In *2001*, humans are helpless and inferior to the machines and computers they desperately rely upon. I commented on how fitting it is that a film about the wonders of machines contains so many beautiful special effects that still hold up decades later.

Just as important as a story itself is how the story is told, and I recognized how Stanley Kubrick's unique use of the film medium brings beauty and thought to *2001*. I believe the film "fails on a human level but succeeds magnificently on a cosmic scale" (Ebert 1968). This is not a riveting, plot-driven story meant for easy entertainment, but rather a philosophical piece of art made to stretch the viewers' minds. Certainly not everyone will appreciate this type of cinematic experience, and I remember seeing several people walk out of the theater before the end of the movie. The film shows the beauty and grace in the most mundane of tasks. Simply docking a ship accompanied by "The Blue Danube" emphasizes the wonder of technology that most people take for granted.

I touched on many of the same topics in his 1968 and 1997 reviews, but there is a difference in the main themes I emphasized in the two reviews. In my 1968 review, I theorized that the ending of the film shows that man will inevitably outgrow his need for technology. Although currently man looks to machines as superior to themselves, he will eventually develop into a more advanced race whose only tool is his mind. In my 1997 review, however, I saw the film as an exploration of humanity and the things that separate man from other living creatures. Humans have become human because we have learned to think. We have become

greater than our ancestors through the development of tools. As man looks outward into the solar system and galaxy, he will advance even more by realizing he lives "not on a planet, but among the stars" (Ebert 1997). The ending sequence and the Star Child are an allegory of sorts for the hopeful future of humanity. In reality, humans don't need a monolith to evolve into something bigger, as long as they pursue the stars.

MY PERSONAL OPINION

The first time I watched *2001: A Space Odyssey* as a teenager, I was not familiar with the film. However, I quickly recognized it as the source of pop culture references I had seen my whole life. I knew it must have been an important film in cinematic history, and it was no secret to me why. The film was breathtaking and fascinating, and I embraced how unique and confusing the story was. I personally don't care what meaning was intended to be ir----- Miller 16 from the film; I find the ambiguity and peculiarity beautiful on its own.

Things that cannot be wholly understood produce the strongest emotions and deepest fascinations in people. Humans are terrified of death and what comes after, fascinated by black holes and general relativity, and take deep joy in the thought of a higher spiritual being looking after them. The mystery of the unknown means the possibilities are endless; they are not even bound by human imagination. This is much of the appeal of *2001*. It's clear to me that the film represents something beyond the scope of the human mind, something I cannot fully understand. I can try to use words to describe it, but I cannot truly fathom it, like trying to imagine a fourth-dimensional object or a new color. I find it almost a relief: when I understand that I cannot understand the film, I can sit back and simply enjoy the beauty of it. I think about a pet cat living in a modern American home. The cat eats food processed in a factory, sleeps on blankets manufactured on the other side of the world, and chases a laser pointer made with science a cat can't begin to understand. The cat is surrounded by an unfathomable, fantastical world, and not only does he not understand it, he doesn't even understand the fact that he doesn't understand it. He simply enjoys the warmth and comfort given to him. In the same way,

if I don't worry about analyzing *2001*, I can simply embrace the ambiguity in spite of my ignorance.

2001 is also a beautiful piece of art, and this is the other reason why I am drawn to it. Unlike most films, which seek to constantly maintain the viewers' attention, *2001* isn't afraid to be quiet and slow. Seemingly long stretches of the film go by where the only sounds are the beeping of a machine and the breathing of one of the crewmembers, but these scenes don't bore me. In fact, the simplicity allows me to appreciate the scenes more. In action films full of fighting and chase scenes, there is often so much going on at once and moving so fast that I miss the details and cannot pay attention. During the long, quiet scenes of *2001*, however, I'm completely engaged with every movement and color on the screen. I notice that the color red is often associated with machines and blue is paired with life. There are a couple of scenes shot with a handheld camera that follows the characters for a long, continuous shot. The most poignant example is when Dave is walking through the corridors of the ships to disconnect HAL. I feel like I'm actually on the ship following behind Dave. This puts the viewers in the film—not an easy task for such an abstract piece of science fiction.

The use of music throughout the film is also interesting. Iconic classical pieces such as "Also Sprach Zarathustra" and "The Blue Danube" set up an atmosphere in a few scenes, but the rest of the film has no soundtrack. The beginning of the Dawn of Man portion features the dramatic "Also Sprach Zarathustra" assaulting the viewers with what now seems like extremely corny music, but is honestly still fitting for the beginning of such a dramatic and important film. Throughout the film, I found that the lack of background music made the scenes more true to life, once again bringing the viewers into the film. For example, when Frank Poole was killed,

there was no suspenseful or mournful music to tell the viewers how to feel—there was only the sound of Frank's breathing, and then there was silence.

Inarguably, the most abstract and artistic part of *2001* was when Dave met the monolith. The screen fills with dizzying colors and patterns, and an overwhelming, otherworldly drone can be heard. As I understand it, during this scene Dave is taking in all the secrets of the universe, from the beginning of time to the ends of the cosmos. As an astronomer in training, I appreciate and relish in the fact that the universe is ultimately incomprehensible to humans, just as it was incomprehensible to Dave before his transformation. This scene attempts to convey a state of mind that is beyond the scope of what humans can comprehend. I feel that one of the main purposes of art is to convey that which cannot be conveyed by traditional means, and the monolith scene is a prime example of this. The colors, the patterns, and the time-warped bedroom invoke an emotion of wonder in me, the same wonder that Dave must have felt in that moment.

The culmination of the film is the imagery of a fetus—something that has only just begun to develop—looking upon Earth after having already experienced and learned so much. “Also Sprach Zarathustra” sounds once again, and I feel that I have just witnessed some sort of extraordinary accomplishment. I don’t understand exactly what that accomplishment is, but I don’t mind.

SOMEONE WHO DOESN'T GET IT AT ALL

If I had to summarize the film *2001: A Space Odyssey*, I would say that it is an incoherent and speculative non-story filled with long stretches of boredom and sprinkled with corny attempts at symbolism.

Starting at the beginning, the film features a long “Dawn of Man” section that has nothing to do with the rest of the film. This scene is like the unused footage from a nature documentary, but instead of actual animals we get to watch men in gorilla suits acting like animals. We then jump to the distant future year of 2001, when humans can travel to the moon with the same comforts of flying first class. The people of the 60’s had such high hopes for the future. Suddenly we’re walking on the surface of the moon and investigating another one of those monolith things—or was it the same one? That much isn’t clear. Then it makes some sort of high-pitched sound that pains the astronauts. Why and how did that happen? How long until the astronauts got away? Come to think of it, I don’t really care, since we never see any of those people again. There are some boring characters and forgettable dialogue I didn’t quite catch. In fact, throughout the entire movie, every single character is boring. They have no personality, and I can barely remember any of their names. They don’t really develop, and they don’t advance the plot.

The only somewhat interesting “character” is the infamous HAL 9000, who is also filled with flaws. We don’t see any evidence for his descent into madness; he just suddenly decides to snap and kill the crew. Other than his creepy, unnaturally calm voice, there is no evidence ahead of time that HAL might be evil. Moreover, HAL is completely unnecessary to the film.

Without him, the crew still would have made it to Jupiter, and they still would have gone through that psychedelic hole. Don't get me started on the psychedelic hole.

Making something weird for weirdness's sake is pointless. I believe that the creators of *2001* made the ending abstract beyond comprehension in an effort to make people debate that there is some sort of deep, intellectual meaning when there is none. The film never explains what the monoliths are, or what HAL's deal is, so how could that ending have any meaning? It was just shapeless colors, like abstract contemporary art. Leaving something "open to interpretation" is a cop-out for not taking the effort to make something make sense. Every story is about a problem that needs to be resolved, but in this story, the only problem is how little sense it makes.

ONE OF THE FIRSTBORNS

Although we are never seen in the flesh, *2001: A Space Odyssey* is a story of us, the Firstborns. The Firstborns are named in *2001*'s sequels, but our presence is subtly obvious in the original story. As explained in the sequels, we are a species that developed interstellar travel millions of years ago, when humans were not yet human. Through our travels we discovered that intelligent life was rare in the universe, but we had the technology and desire to give evolution a helping hand. We strategically placed devices referred to as "monoliths" across the galaxy that would encourage the development of intelligent life. Although it would take millions of years, the beings that encountered these monoliths would develop the same level of intelligence as us, and we would no longer be so alone in the universe.

Three of the monoliths were placed in the human's solar system. The first was placed on Earth, where the primates living there would immediately find it and learn to use tools. Their opposable thumbs and bipedal stature made the primates the obvious candidate for expedited evolution. After millions of years of developing tools, the beings would inevitably develop space travel, and they would visit their nearest celestial body, their moon. Buried under the lunar surface was the second monolith, which acts mainly as a signature on our part. By discovering an object that obviously did not come from nature or humans, they would have an answer to the question "Are we alone?"—a question we Firstborns once contemplated. Once this monolith is uncovered, a third monolith in orbit around Jupiter will begin to transmit a signal, encouraging the humans to stretch to the far reaches of their solar system. Whoever can make

it there is ready for the next level of consciousness. They are ready to see the universe for what it is, all at once.

In some ways, the humans are not all that different from us. Some may criticize our interference with life when we accelerated the evolutionary process, but they essentially did the same thing with their creation of artificial intelligence. Most notably, they built the famed computer HAL 9000 so they would have a companion and assistant on their ventures. However, the humans' conceit is apparent when we examine how they interact with HAL. When the Firstborns planted the monoliths across the galaxy, we then left the subjects of our experiment alone. We could have enslaved them, or at least shaped them into our own image. Rather, we allowed them to develop their own way into whatever form nature would determine was best for them. When the humans built HAL, however, they immediately put him to work, performing menial calculations, learning children's songs, and evaluating human artwork. Rather than let him develop his own unique personality and interests, HAL was forced to mimic human behavior as closely as possible for the sake of his human companions. This turned out to be the humans' downfall, at least for the crew of the *Discovery*, as they could not completely understand the mind of something that was not themselves. They provided HAL with two conflicting pieces of programming, and he could only right his mind by killing the crew.

Humans see themselves as the epitome of intelligent life: all other forms of intelligent life must be compared to them. In reality, they were not even capable of evolving without our help. We existed millions of years before the humans ever did, and if they continue to destroy themselves with their perverse attempts to create artificial intelligence in their own image, we will continue to exist for millions of years after they are gone. Humans viewing the film *2001*

usually say that the film is about man's journey, or man's desire to overcome. Yet the film isn't even about humans at all. It is a documentary about evolution and our monoliths' place in it all.

Unlike most man-made films, which tell the story of an individual's personal journey and how he develops as a character, the humans in *2001* are incidental. They are included in the story because there must be some humans to undergo the evolution, but they are not dynamic characters. They do not have dynamic personalities or deep backstories. The film is not about individual people; it is about evolution. It may be argued that the film is ultimately about the Firstborns, since we are the ones who orchestrated the whole process.

A STARCHILD

Those humans who ask “what is the purpose of life?” as a method of developing a reason to continue living are asking the wrong question. The purpose of life is to live long enough to create new life; this is what millions of years of evolution have brought about. Only the beings that are able to survive do survive. If they did not survive, they would not exist. Life, therefore, is a self-fulfilling prophecy. There is no inherent purpose in life besides continuing life, because without continuing life there would be no life in the first place. This is the inevitable result of evolution: no matter what planet in the universe you observe, survival of the fittest is the law of the land. Evolution has also, fortunately or unfortunately, shaped some beings to desire more than breeding and death. Humans form religions, philosophies, or simply personal goals that give them a reason to be, something to work toward. Most agree that having a goal in life is a sign of high intelligence; it’s something that the lesser animals do not experience. To me, a Star Child, however, this great ambition is a sign of middle intelligence. Humans’ primordial ancestors certainly had no greater ambition than surviving to the next day, but the next form of human evolution—the star child, like me—also doesn’t have petty ambitions, at least not in the same way that modern humans do. The human mind is limited. It sees only one place at one time. It only sees certain types of light, and it interprets the world around it in a way that makes sense to humans, but isn’t totally accurate. Once someone has reached the stage of existence known as the star child, however, they see true reality, the universe as it really is. A physical brain cannot misinterpret stimuli if there is no physical brain, but rather, a being of pure energy. We are no longer bound by physical limitations. There is no

such thing as a unique interpretation to a star child, because there is only one interpretation—the truth. Anything else is a lie, warped by the limitations of the human body and mind. Because star children see the universe as it really is, we recognize that there is no inherent purpose for being. This does not disturb us, however, as it disturbs those of middle intelligence. We exist simply because the chaotic events of time has led to our existence. We go about our inevitable existence, seeing all there is to see, and experiencing all there is to experience. We do not say that this is “good” or “bad” because those are concepts created by those of middle intelligence. There simply *is*. The film *2001: A Space Odyssey* explains the development that must take place for a being to evolve from one of ape-intelligence to one of human-intelligence to one with the mind of a star child.

The film begins by telling the truth about the universe. For several minutes a black screen is accompanied by a droning sound. This is a representation made to convey to human viewers the reality of the early universe. People today look upon deep space photography in awe and marvel at its beauty, but at the time, there was nothing conscious to appreciate or even be aware of this beauty. The universe was not yet aware of itself. The best way to portray this is by a simple black screen. Most people say that the accompanying droning is ominous sounding, and an appropriate fit to convey the mysterious and lonely early universe. Then, the human’s ancestors begin their journeys. The primates live ho-hum, uninspired lives that involve lounging on some rocks, consuming sustenance, and an occasional scuffle. These beings have no ambition beyond surviving to the next day, and they have no purpose outside of reproducing. Once the monolith comes along and inspires them to use tools, however, that all changes. With the use of tools, these primates can make life easier and more interesting for

themselves. They can then develop an ambition to constantly improve themselves and their kind. Sticks and rocks turn into telescopes and printing presses that turn into satellites and nuclear weapons. The development of technology and the advancement of knowledge are two phenomena that go hand in hand. In order to develop new tools and machines, a being of middle intelligence must learn the physical laws of the universe. In order to better study the universe, man must develop new technology. The monolith technically only inspired early man to use tools, but it ultimately lead to both the ability and the desire to travel into space. During this stage of evolution, man both strays from nature and becomes close with nature. He strays from nature because of his increasing dependence on the comforts of man-made technology, and he becomes closer to nature by better understanding the science of the world.

The advancement of science and technology is necessary to the development of man's mind, but it is not the end goal. Rather, the advancement of technology develops man's mind until he can be free from it: in other words, until he is ready to become a star child. As a star child, I don't use or need technology whatsoever. My power is in my mind, and my knowledge is limitless. I can see to the ends of the cosmos without special telescopes, and I can calculate the motions of stars without a computer. Star children see within and beyond the dimensions of spacetime that humans experience, turning even the most sophisticated geometrical problems into mental math. Free from the physical limitations of man, I also don't need technology for any comforts or needs. I don't need a refrigerator to preserve sustenance, and I don't need a television for entertainment. Humans would describe me as a spiritual being rather than a physical one. Another consequence of this state of mind is I am no longer ambitious, at least not in the way those of middle intelligence are. I don't have trivial career

goals or relationship goals. As a being who sees the truth of the universe, I see that those things are temporary and insignificant. The truth is that I exist, I am conscious, and I am observing the universe. That is what I am, and that is what I live for. I would not have gotten to this state of mind, however, if I did not have goals and aspirations when I was a human, just as Dave would never have become a star child if humans didn't have the ambition to travel into space. This is the story of *2001*.

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